

Marcus Pye



Humble Pye

"Scott Mansell's Brands achievement is truly world class"

EIGHTEEN-year-old prodigy Scott Mansell's achievement in shattering the outright lap record for the 1.35-mile Brands Hatch Indy circuit on Sunday – he left it at 38.032s – is truly a world-class effort, worthy of the huge audience at the Civil Service Motoring Association event.

Erasing Adrian Fernandez's Champ Car target on the same track has added considerable weight to Mansell's reputation. It tops similar milestones on the National layouts at Silverstone and Donington Park, set by Earl Goddard (Benetton-Ford HB V8 B194) and Nigel Greensall (Tyrrell-Judd V10 022) in previous EuroBOSS races.

Mansell's Benetton B197, with its stretched four-litre Judd V10 engine belting out more than 730bhp, was a far wieldier tool for the job than Fernandez's turbocharged Lola-Ford IndyCar was last May. That is clearly reflected in the Briton's qualifying charge of 37.981s.

The worry is, however, that all his apparent skill and youthful bravado in a rampant downforce-laden machine, geared for more than 180mph on the short track is far from matched across the typical EuroBOSS field of around a dozen starters. Perhaps fortuitously, several were missing from Brands. The other four who ran, while lapped twice by the flying victor, at least circulated competently within five seconds of the pace.

How the series survives is a mystery. Its very status has been constantly under review by British motorsport's governing body, the MSA, and organising clubs in recent years, threatened by lack of entries. And veteran Friedrich Glatz's death at Most, in the Czech Republic, two years ago, fulfilled the worst premonitions of those who had witnessed a couple of monumental accidents at Donington previously.

But near-misses, and miraculous escapes, are not logged in the statistics of an inherently dangerous sport. Thus we enthusiasts who enjoy seeing true grit embodied in a youngster, whose meteoric rise from a 600cc Formula Honda to a Formula 3000 car seemed ill-advised on the surface, still experience the spectacle.

Despite Mansell's recent form, sadly he may get no further in this strangely blinkered business. Contemporary Formula 1 teams will not look outside the box, beyond the mainstream feeder formulas, even to fill a testing role. Thus the world may never know his full potential.

Mansell has had one F1 call-up as a result, though. Classic Team Lotus – run by Clive Chapman, son of marque founder Colin whose talent-spotting ability was legendary – put a Mansell other than Nigel in one of its cars at Brands. Scott's privilege of a demonstration outing in Lotus's stunning John Player Special-liveried 91 in which Elio de Angelis won the '82 Austrian Grand Prix was appreciated by fans of the late Roman, who lost his life following a needless testing accident in an F1 Brabham at Paul Ricard 18 years ago this month. When young Mr Mansell was but a babe in his mother's arms.



Fernandez's lap record was eclipsed by 18-year-old Scott Mansell